

Family Stories & Photos

Harry and Elizabeth



We are acquainted with many of the facts surrounding the lives of Harry and Elizabeth Romein; however, there are no facts or family stories about when Harry Romein met Elizabeth DeMik.

We know Harry's family lived in Roseland, a suburb of Chicago, from the time they immigrated to America in 1890 until 1893. We know Elizabeth was born and raised in the DeMik family in Roseland. Harry was four

years old in 1890 and seven years old in 1893, while Elizabeth was two years old in 1890 and five years old in 1893. Harry's parents, Teunis and Sadie, and Elizabeth's parents, William and Clara, lived within a few blocks of one another in Roseland.

We know the Romein family moved in 1893 to another Chicago suburb, South Holland. Elizabeth and her family remained in Roseland, so Harry and Elizabeth were separated by a distance of about ten miles.



Nine years later, in 1902, the Romein family moved to Wichert, sixty miles from Roseland, and a long distance in the horse and buggy days for Harry and Elizabeth to travel to see one another. They managed to find a way to make the trip, however, and Harry brought his new bride to their farm in Wichert after they were married in 1911.

With these facts in mind, we can speculate how and when Harry and Elizabeth first met. Since their parents lived in close proximity in Roseland, the two families may have been acquainted from the time Harry and Elizabeth were young children. The two families may have kept in touch when Teunis and Sadie moved their family to South Holland and then to Wichert. Elizabeth's brother, Julius, moved to Wichert circa 1910, so Harry and Elizabeth may have met only a year or so before they married,

through Julius. It's possible they met through other members of their families, including their siblings in the photo below who attended a church picnic with Harry and Elizabeth in 1910.

This begs the question how *did* Harry and Elizabeth overcome the major challenge of getting together? The Ford Model T, also known as the “tin Lizzie”, became available in the early 1900's, so Harry or his parents may have owned the “new fangled” vehicle. The telephone was new and available in the early 1900's as well. They may have corresponded by letter or perhaps Harry made the round trip between Wichert and Chicago on the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad.



*Attending a church picnic in Roseland, 1910.
Left to right: Unknown; Harry's brother Peter; John's fiancée Sophia;
Elizabeth's brother John; Elizabeth; Harry; Unknown*

We likely will never learn the answer to this question. What we do know is Harry and Elizabeth met, fell in love, married, and raised a family. The rest, as they say, is history.



Harry

Harry never knew a stranger. He struck up a conversation wherever he went. When he could take time away from his work on the farm, he liked to play dominoes. Sometimes he would set up a row of tobacco cans and push the first can in the row. His grandchildren watched in fascination as each can fell in succession.

Harry was an avid sports fan, rooting for his favorite Chicago major league teams. He frequently bantered with his son Tunie and daughter Clara about the finer points of baseball and basketball. All three became experts at beating the referees in making calls as they listened to games on the radio.

Harry was highly respected for his work in the church and community. He fulfilled his Christian commitment by serving as a deacon and elder in the First Reformed Church of Wichert and he carried out his sense of responsibility to his community as a member of the Board of Trustees for the St. Anne Community High School. He had a sterling reputation for being absolutely honest and people knew they could trust him to do the right thing in every situation.

Harry could be a bit “grouchy” at times. One time, Harry and Elizabeth drove their car to the Vander Meer home to pick up their granddaughter, Carol, who was going to stay with them until Clara came home from the hospital with new baby sister, Dorothy. Carol was three years old and didn’t understand what was happening when her father placed her in the back seat of Harry’s car. The only thing Carol knew was she was being “taken away” and she started crying loudly and inconsolably.

At that moment, the headlights on Harry’s car burned out. Harry was frustrated because it was getting darker by the minute and he had no headlights. He blurted out to Carol: “See what you did”!

That incident became one of Carol’s earliest memories; however, she later laughed about it because she learned her grandpa Harry actually was quite easygoing - at least, most of the time.

Harry was industrious and worked hard his whole life, on his parents’ farm (right) with his brothers and on his own farm. He was healthy until the age of 76 when he suffered a major stroke which incapacitated him. Harry’s doctor identified his pipe smoking as the cause for the stroke and warned him to quit smoking. Harry did so – in just one day.



Harry at his parents’ home with their dog (name unknown) and laundry “freeze drying” on the clothesline (right side).

Toward the end of his life, Harry gradually lost his cognitive skills and experienced increasing confusion. He clearly remembered when he was a four-year-old emigrating with his family from the Netherlands, coming into the New York Harbor on a ship, and seeing the Statue of Liberty. However, he could not remember what was happening from one moment to the next in the present.

Tragically, the final few days Harry lived on this earth were filled with suffering, for him and for his family. In 1970, he became seriously ill and had to be hospitalized with gangrene in his right leg, femoral artery thrombosis, arteriosclerosis, hypertensive heart disease, and renal disease with severe uremia. In addition, he was bewildered and distraught to the extent he became like a frightened young child.

Incredibly, although Harry was suffering intensely from serious diseases, his doctors recommended dealing with the crisis of the rapidly spreading gangrene by amputating his leg. Clearly, Harry no longer was able to understand what was happening, so Clara

and Sally, Tunie's wife, stepped in to support Elizabeth as she made the heart-rending decision. Elizabeth declined to give the doctors permission for the amputation and she instructed them to make Harry as comfortable as possible until the end.

On April 15, 1970, Harry Romein passed away at Riverside Hospital in Kankakee, Illinois and was buried in Oakwood Cemetery. He was 83 years old.



Elizabeth

After Elizabeth married Harry Romein in 1911 and they moved to Wichert, she found that making the transition from a bustling Chicago suburb to a quiet farm in the country was a major step. Initially, she felt isolated because she missed the conveniences of city living and being near her family and friends. She maintained a positive attitude, a trait that served her well throughout her lifetime, and she made the best of her new environment.

After a few years, Elizabeth's parents and the rest of her family were living in Wichert as well. She made many new friends as more people moved in and she became fully immersed in her life as a respected member of the Wichert community. After her son Tunie and daughter Clara were born, Elizabeth was satisfyingly busy.

Unlike her more outgoing husband, Elizabeth was soft-spoken and quiet to the point of being shy. She was as beautiful as Harry was handsome. She enjoyed being a homemaker and she maintained a sense of elegance as she sewed all her clothes, including her size six wedding dress.

Elizabeth expressed her commitment to church and community, but she did it in a much more inconspicuous way than Harry by serving as a midwife. Wichert was located far from town in the horse and buggy days and women who went into labor often gave birth before the doctor could reach them. Elizabeth helped many neighbors as they waited for the doctor and she delivered their babies if he didn't arrive in time.

Having her picture taken was one thing Elizabeth truly disliked. In most of her photos, she appeared solemn and usually looked



Elizabeth tending the horses in front of her home in Wichert and making the best of her new life on the farm (circa 1911).

away from the camera. Actually, she was kind and considerate to everyone and she was known for her caring ways, humbleness, and sincerity. Frequently, she visited neighborhood shut-ins who were sick, bringing them fresh flowers and vegetables from her fertile garden. Elizabeth's strawberries were the best. During the summer months, she often crossed the rickety bridge over a dredge ditch to carry a couple quarts of her strawberries to Clara's home so she could enjoy a bowl of fresh strawberries covered with cream and sugar with her daughter and granddaughters. What a treat!

Elizabeth possessed an unwavering sense of right and wrong and a determination to help her children learn to hold fast to their beliefs and values, regardless of what others might say or think. For example, one summer, Tunie wanted to shoot baskets on Sunday afternoons instead of taking a nap between the morning and evening church services. The prevailing belief of the members of the Wichert Church, however, was that the only "Christian" thing they should do on Sunday afternoons was to take a nap. Harry wanted to move the basketball hoop to the back wall of the barn so passersby would not be able to see Tunie's "lack of discretion". Elizabeth felt there was nothing wrong with shooting baskets on Sunday afternoons, so she convinced Harry to keep the hoop on the front of the barn, in plain view to anyone passing by.

Elizabeth followed the national and international news closely and she demonstrated an eager awareness of current events. One of her favorite pastimes was solving the crossword puzzles that appeared daily in the local newspaper. She was able to accomplish one feat few people can do – she could bend and touch the floor, not just with her fingertips, but with the palms of her hands flat on the floor.

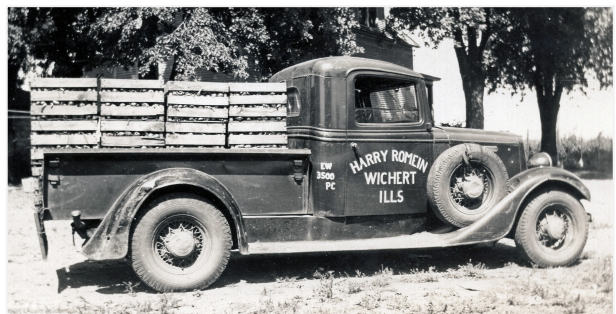
Elizabeth developed uterine cancer when she was in her 70s; however, she did well following surgery to remove the tumor. One serious issue she experienced in her later years came as the result of an unfortunate fall down the steps leading into her home. Her hip was broken and she screamed in agony until help arrived.



*Harry & Elizabeth's 50th Wedding Anniversary
Open House, March 30, 1961*

In her final days, she suffered from advanced arteriosclerotic cardiovascular disease and chronic renal failure. She passed away March 2, 1982, at St. Mary's Hospital in Kankakee, Illinois and was buried in Oakwood Cemetery. Elizabeth Romein was 93 years old.

Harry and Elizabeth's Farm



Harry and Elizabeth maintained their sixty-acre farm their entire married lives. Throughout the years, they raised cows and chickens, a large assortment of vegetables, and gladioli. They worked long, hard days year-round - Harry in the fields and Elizabeth in their home - to make a good life for their family.

Home Sweet Home

In 1963, after Harry and Elizabeth experienced health issues, they decided to move into a mobile dwelling (below) situated across the driveway from the house where they had lived since 1911. Clara's husband had passed away so she sold their farm and moved into the Romein house to be close to help her father and mother.



As she always did, Elizabeth made the best of the situation and created a cozy, comfortable place to call “home” (below). The dwelling proved to be perfect for them. Elizabeth did as much housework as she could manage and Clara helped her with the rest.

On several occasions, it was fortunate Clara was close at hand. For example, one of the lasting effects of the stroke Harry suffered was that he was weak, and even though he used a cane, he often became unsteady on his feet. One time, he took a bad fall and was unable to get up, so Clara rushed to his assistance and helped him.



Also, when bad weather conditions were predicted, Clara walked over and brought Harry and Elizabeth to the house where they remained until the threat had ended.

After Harry passed away and Elizabeth's vision increasingly failed, she sold the mobile dwelling and moved back into the house where she lived out the remainder of her days under Clara's care.



Life in the Romein Family



Being a member of Harry and Elizabeth Romein's family was an experience their son Tunie recalled with fondness in an article, *Recollections of Early Wichert Days*.^{*1} The following is an excerpt from the article:

Our home was a busy place in a quiet sort of way. Breakfast, dinner, and supper always came at the same time with everybody sitting down at the same time, and each meal was followed with Bible reading and the Lord's prayer. Even though my parents [Harry and Elizabeth] had no more than an elementary education, good music was emphasized. Early we already had a phonograph, and a small organ, and many records of singers like Caruso and Galli Curci. We also had

ample supplies of books to read. Grandpa Romein [Harry] was a member of the men's double quartet which often practiced at our home. Grandma Romein's [Elizabeth] work was hard and required long hours: washing clothes with a machine powered by a gasoline motor; ironing by hand; baking bread, making butter; keeping the house spotlessly clean; sewing clothes and mending, and preparing at least five meals a day (breakfast, morning lunch for the fields, dinner, afternoon tea, supper, and sometimes a 9 p.m. refreshment). Sunday evenings were often times when families got together – the old folks in one room, and the children in the kitchen to play games. These were really enjoyable times.

^{*1}*Recollections of Early Wichert Days*, by Tunie Romein II, provided by Libby Romein Bartley, Tunie's daughter